

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

TRIBUTE TO ALVIN AND EULA BLANKENSHIP

HON. DAVID YOUNG

OF IOWA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 23, 2015

Mr. YOUNG of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor Alvin and Eula Blankenship of Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the very special occasion of their 80th wedding anniversary.

Alvin and Eula's lifelong commitment to each other, their daughter, two grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and three great-great grandchildren embodies our Iowa values. All five generations were on hand to help Alvin and Eula celebrate this very special day. I salute this devoted couple on their 80th year together and I wish them many more years of happiness. I know my colleagues in the House will join me in congratulating them on this momentous occasion. I wish them and their family all the best moving forward.

HONORING LESTER L. STROUP

HON. DOUG LAMBORN

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 23, 2015

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the legacy of Lester L. Stroup, a veteran, a former prisoner of war and a treasured member of the Colorado Springs community. Throughout his life, Lester proudly served and sacrificed for his country, then devoted the remainder of this life to veterans' organizations in the Pikes Peak Region.

Lester joined the Army in 1949, during the Second World War, and was assigned to the artillery outfit of the 2nd Infantry Division. Shortly thereafter, he was deployed in defense of the Busan Perimeter following North Korea's invasion of South Korea in 1950. Lester would be on the front lines only one month when his artillery battery was overrun and suffered a defeat. Wounded and surrounded by Chinese forces, Lester and his unit were captured on December 1, 1950. A brutal 400-mile march to the Puchkin Mining Camp initiated Lester's time as a prisoner of war, which lasted for exactly 1,000 days.

While imprisoned at the Puchkin Mining Camp, Lester and 750 of his fellow American servicemen were compelled to act as their own burial detail. Every day, on the brink of starvation, these gallant soldiers went out in groups of 12 or 14 to dig shallow graves for prisoners who had died. In less than one year's time, five hundred American prisoners of war perished in this camp, also known as the Death Valley Camp. When Lester was finally released, he was denied the Purple Heart Medal for lack of medical records maintained by the Chinese forces.

Lester first retired in 1969 with 20 years of service in the Army, re-enlisting in 1970 and

serving a voluntary combat tour in Vietnam. After retiring for good as a First Sergeant in 1975, he dedicated his time and energy to the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Ex-Prisoners of War, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Retired Enlisted Association, Disabled American Veterans, and American Legion Post 5. In 2006, Lester vigorously led the effort to erect a beautiful memorial that now stands in Colorado Springs in memory of our POWs.

Until he passed away on August 17, 2014 at the age of 84, Lester unsparingly gave of himself to his fellow ex-prisoners of war and other veterans. His legacy will now be carried on by Doris, his wife of 58 years, his children, his friends, and those with whom he associated as a volunteer. I am greatly honored to celebrate the life and service of Lester Stroup, a patriot whose uncommon and tireless devotion to his country will never be forgotten by his fellow citizens.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 23, 2015

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, the Vietnamese-American community is celebrating its 40th year in the U.S. We often think of 1975 as a time of tragedy and loss, as the Vietnam War ended with helicopters flying off the U.S. Embassy. But from tragedy has come hope and prosperity. The Vietnamese-American community has added so much to the American fabric. They are a shining example of an immigrant community, many who came here penniless refugees, who has made important contributions to the United States.

The subcommittee I chair has held numerous hearings on human rights in Vietnam and we have discussed a range of concerns, from restrictions on religious freedom to the jailing and torture of dissidents.

From sex and labor trafficking to the censorship of the press and Internet, the Vietnamese Government and Communist Party continues to be one of the world's worst abusers of human rights. We may want to sweep that reality under the table, paper it over by promises of security cooperation and trade deals. But that reality stares us in the face and requires us to ask whether U.S. policy really serves the people of Vietnam, people who want our liberties and freedoms as much as our trade.

The U.S. Government must continue to press the Vietnamese government on truly fundamental human rights issues, not only in human rights dialogue, but in all meetings with Vietnamese officials, at the highest levels from the U.S. President on down.

Sixty-six percent of the Vietnamese population is under 35, they don't remember the war, they want their lives to look like those of their Vietnamese cousins in the U.S., in Australia, and Canada. Our policies cannot only

be directed at the Vietnamese elite in the Communist Party, but must focus on the people of Vietnam. They are looking for U.S. leadership; they are hungry for a U.S. policy that advances the rights and freedoms of the Vietnamese people. They understand that if the U.S. sides with the Vietnamese Government, they will only receive crumbs from the Communist Party's table.

Our economic, security, and freedom interests must be linked. The Vietnamese Government needs U.S. security cooperation and economic benefits more than the U.S. needs Vietnam. We have leverage to bring about concrete changes in Vietnam. We must not give up or ignore this leverage.

If human rights issues are not explicitly linked to our economic and security interests, we risk having discussions on trade and defense moving forward, while human rights conditions go backward.

Trade between the U.S. and Vietnam has exponentially expanded since Vietnam was granted normal trade relations in 2000. If this expansion is to continue under the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP for short, then the American people should at least be assured that Vietnam, currently our 15th largest source of imports, is protecting basic freedoms.

If the past is any indicator, Vietnam will regress from political liberalization as soon as it gains preferential trade status. In 2007, after the United States lifted its long-standing objection to Vietnam's membership in the World Trade Organization, Hanoi responded by launching the first of three waves of arrests that jailed over one hundred dissidents and introduced sweeping new laws restricting freedom of association, assembly, and the Internet. In short, Vietnam's WTO accession allowed the Communist government free license to jail, torture, and abuse.

Further, when the State Department removed Vietnam from the list of Countries of Particular Concern as a gesture of goodwill in 2006, we once again saw backsliding. Despite the State Department's decision in 2006 to remove Vietnam from the list of Countries of Particular Concern as designated pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act, Vietnam, in fact, continues to be among the worst violators of religious freedom in the world.

According to the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom's 2015 Annual Report, "The Vietnamese Government continues to control all religious activities through law and administrative oversight, restrict severely independent religious practice, and repress individuals and religious groups it views as challenging its authority . . ." I agree with USCIRF's conclusion that Vietnam should be designated a CPC country.

I met courageous religious leaders during my trips to Vietnam who were struggling for fundamental human rights in their country. Unfortunately, many of them, including Father Ly and the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do, remain wrongly detained today. There are disturbing reports that Father Ly is suffering poor

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